

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DUBLIN 00316 091653 Z

73

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-09 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-14 USIA-12 IO-13

OMB-01 T-03 RSR-01 /108 W
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R 091415 Z MAR 73

FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4477

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PBOR, EI

SUBJ: ANGLO- IRISH CONFRONTATION POSSIBLE

REF: DUBLIN 129 AND 302

BEGIN SUMMARY: OF TWO EVENTS TODAY, MARCH 8, THE MOST
PUBLICIZED-- THE NI BORDER PLEBISCITE-- MAY HAVE LESS POTENTIAL
FOR TROUBLE THAN HEATH- COSGRAVE MEETING OVER WHITE PAPER.
END SUMMARY.

1. WITH LUCK, TODAY' S BORDER " POLL" (PLEBISCITE) MAY
TURN OUT TO BE MERELY USELESS. AS SEEN FROM DUBLIN POLL HAS
ALWAYS PRESENTED RISKS OF FURTHER VIOLENT NI POLARIZATION
(DUBLIN 1264, NOV 2, 1972), BUT THERE NOW SEEMS BE GOOD
CHANCE EVENT WILL HAVE LITTLE IMPACT. BOTH SIDES MAY
HAVE OPPORTUNITY CLAIM MORAL VICTORY IN A BATTLE WHICH
IS NOT RELATED TO ANY REAL NI PROBLEM.

A) PROTESTANTS WILL SURELY BE ABLE CLAIM THAT MOST
PEOPLE WHO WENT TO POLLS VOTED FOR RETENTION OF LINKS
WITH UK. FOR MOST PROTESTANTS, REMAINING PART OF UK
IS A VALID OPTION, THOUGH OTHER OPTIONS-- SUCH AS
INDEPENDENT ULSTER-- ARE INCREASINGLY BEING CONSIDERED
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PAGE 02 DUBLIN 00316 091653 Z

BY SOME LEADERS.

B) CATHOLICS, ON OTHER HAND, MAY BE IN POSITION CLAIM THAT ALMOST HALF OF NI POPULATION REFRAINED FROM VOTING. THIS CLAIM WOULD LUMP PURPOSEFUL CATHOLIC ABSTENTIONISTS WITH APATHETIC PROTESTANTS. SUCH REASONING, HOWEVER, IS NOT LIKELY TROUBLE MANY WHO FELT THAT OPTION THEY WERE GIVEN IN POLL WAS ALSO SPECIOUS. NO ONE FROM SEAN MACSTIOFAIN TO JACK LYNCH IS SUGGESTING THAT NI JOIN THE REPUBLIC, WHICH IS THE "CATHOLIC" QUESTION IN PLEBISCITE.

2. THERE IS, THUS, ROOM FOR HOPE THAT PLEBISCITE WILL NOT PRODUCE CONCLUSIVE ADVANTAGE FOR EITHER SIDE. IF IT DOES PRODUCE CLEAR PROPAGANDA ADVANTAGE FOR ONE COMMUNITY, EXERCISE WILL HAVE CREATED TROUBLE, BECAUSE ANY REAL SOLUTION TO NI PROBLEM DOES NOT INVOLVE TRIUMPH FOR EITHER TRIBE.

3. THOUGH MEDIA ATTENTION IS FOCUSED ON PLEBISCITE, THERE IS PERHAPS MORE SERIOUS RISK IN TALKS BETWEEN PM HEATH AND COSGRAVE (AND NOW CORISH) ON WHITE PAPER. SIGNALS WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING FOR SOME TIME (REFTELS) INDICATE THAT IRISH ARE PROFOUNDLY DISTURBED OVER EARLY LEAKS ON BRITISH PLANS. FONOFF AND PM LYNCH HAVE BOTH INDICATED THAT THEY WERE DISPOSED MAKE THIS A CRUNCH ISSUE, REFUSING SUPPORT WHITE PAPER IF IT DID NOT MEET MINIMUM IRISH REQUIREMENTS.

4. SO FAR, BOTH DURING ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND BRIEF PERIOD AFTER IT, ALL THREE MAJOR PARTIES HERE HAVE SEEMED SHARE SAME NI POLICY. IF COSGRAVE WERE DISPOSED WEAKEN THIS POLICY, LYNCH AND FIANNA FAIL COULD BE EXPECTED MAKE SERIOUS TROUBLE. IN FACT, HOWEVER, WE DOUBT THAT COSGRAVE IS AT ALL DISPOSED TO DILUTE BASIC IRISH CONDITIONS FOR WHITE PAPER. ON CONTRARY, HEATH COULD FIND HIM TOUGHTER TO DEAL WITH THAN LYNCH. HARDEST PART OF DEALING WITH LYNCH WAS TO FIND OUT WHAT HE REALLY THOUGHT, THOUGH HE EVENTUALLY MADE POSITION CLEAR IN CASE OF WHITE PAPER. COSGRAVE MAY PROVE MORE DECISIVE, MORE INCLINED SEE ISSUES OF PRINCIPLE, AND MORE INTRACTABLE WHEN HE HAS TAKEN A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 DUBLIN 00316 091653 Z

POSITION. ON OTHER HAND, HE IS FROM MOST MODERATE

OF TRADITIONAL IRISH PARTIES. FINE GAEL IS DIRECT
DESCENDANT OF PRO- TREATY PARTY, IN WHICH COSGRAVE' S
FATHER PLAYED DECISIVE ROLE, AND WHICH ACCEPTED PARTITION
AS A TEMPORARY EXPEDIENT IN 20 S-- BRINGING ON CIVIL
WAR WITH FIANNA FAIL' S FOUNDERS. COSGRAVE IS LIKELY
BE HIGHLY AWARE OF THIS HISTORY, AND ALSO AWARE THAT
IN 1920 PARTITION WAS NOT INTENDED BE PERMANENT. HE
WILL NOT BE ANXIOUS GO DOWN IN HISTORY AS TAOISEACH
WHO ACCEPTED PERMANENT PARTITION.

5. BUT WE ARE NOT PREDICTING CONFRONTATION. DANGERS
ARE SO OBVIOUS THAT BOTH BRITISH AND IRISH WILL BE WELL
AWARE OF THEM. AS A TAOISEACH, COSGRAVE IS UNKNOWN QUANTITY,
AND NI PROBLEM COULD BE SEVERE TEST FOR HIM-- AT A TIME
WHEN HE HAS NOT EVEN FORMED HIS GOVT. WE ASSUME THAT
HE WILL WISH ACCEPT WHITE PAPER AND ASSIST IN ITS
IMPLEMENTATION IF HE POSSIBLY CAN. LIKE LYNCH, HE WILL
NOT EXPECT IT GO BEYOND EARLIER GREEN PAPER. IF HE
IS DOUBTFUL, HE DOES NOT SEEM TYPE TO TAKE SNAP
DECISION. ON CONTRARY, HE MIGHT WELL RETURN TO DUBLIN
FOR FULL CONSULTATIONS BEFORE GIVING REPLY TO HEATH.
ONLY IF REPLY SHOULD THEN BE NEGATIVE WOULD ANGLO- IRISH
CONFRONTATION RESULT. SORENSON

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